

(2) in section 1710(g)(1), by inserting “(except if such services constitute hospice care)” after “medical services”; and

(3) in section 1710B(c)(2), by striking subparagraph (B) and inserting after subparagraph (A) the following new subparagraph (B):

“(B) to a veteran being furnished inpatient or outpatient hospice care by the Department; or”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. I thank Mr. MILLER for bringing us this bill, because working with Mr. MICHAUD of Maine, we have an important piece of legislation that most people would have thought dealt with a problem that didn't exist.

Mr. Speaker, hospice and palliative care is a continuum of comfort-oriented and supportive services provided across settings, including hospitals, extended facilities, outpatient clinics and private residences. The VA offers a complement of hospice and palliative care options as part of a comprehensive health care benefit of provided to all veterans who are enrolled in our system.

Under current law, a veteran receiving hospice care in a nursing home is exempt from any applicable copayments. However, if the hospice care is provided in any other setting, such as an acute-care hospital or at home, the veteran may be subject to an in-patient or out-patient primary care copayment. This policy penalizes a veteran who chooses to remain at home for their hospice care or who, out of medical necessity, receives hospice care in an acute care setting.

Mr. MILLER recognizes this injustice, and through H.R. 2623, corrects the inequity by exempting all hospice care provided through VA from copayment requirements. It would also align VA with the Medicare program, which does not impose copayments for hospice care. At the end of life, veterans should not have to worry about paying for the comfort that the hospice care provides.

It's the right thing to do, and I am pleased that my colleague from Florida has taken leadership on this,

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER of Florida. I thank the chairman again for his willingness to quickly move this legislation to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 2623, as amended, is a bill that I am a sponsor of. It prohibits the collection of copayments for all hospice care furnished by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Hospice and palliative care is a continuum of comfort-oriented and supportive services provided across settings, including hospitals, extended care facilities, as the chairman said, outpatient clinics, and private residences. Under current law, a veteran receiving care in a nursing home is ex-

empt from any copay. However, if they choose to take that care in their own home or in an acute-care facility, they could be charged a copayment. VA's current policy would penalize a veteran who chooses to remain in their own home for their end-of-life care or, out of medical necessity, receives their care in an acute-care setting.

The bipartisan support of this bill is greatly appreciated. I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 2623, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, once again, I would state that with bipartisan working arrangements we have brought forward a package of bills today from the Veterans Committee which deals not only with our older veterans, but with our returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, and that's what we will continue to do.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2623, as amended.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2623, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

PUGET SOUND WATERSHED COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PROJECT ACT OF 2007

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3184) to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a competitive grant program for the Puget Sound area to provide comprehensive conservation planning to address water quality.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3184

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Puget Sound Watershed Comprehensive Conservation Project Act of 2007”.

SEC. 2. COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLANNING FOR PUGET SOUND AREA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall carry out a competitive grant

program for the Puget Sound area to provide comprehensive conservation planning to address water quality. The Secretary shall enter into cooperative agreements with State and local governments, Indian tribes, or non-governmental entities with a history of working with agricultural producers to carry out projects under the program.

(b) ASSISTANCE.—In carrying out the program, the Secretary may—

(1) provide project demonstration grants, provide technical assistance and carry out information and education programs to improve water quality in the Puget Sound area by reducing soil erosion and improving sediment control; and

(2) provide a priority for projects and activities that directly reduce soil erosion or improve water quality.

(c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to carry out the program.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from South Dakota.

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Puget Sound is home to over 4 million people and numerous species of fish, birds and other wildlife. It is the economic and environmental driver of the region and an ecological wonder. Sadly, the health of this national treasure has been steadily in decline. The water quality is suffering with areas of deadly low oxygen and levels of harmful toxics that are now being detected in some aquatic species.

However, there is hope. The State of Washington has been leading the charge in fighting this problem and working to restore the Sound to where it should be. This legislation will provide critical support to those efforts by developing a comprehensive conservation project to help determine the right conservation planning efforts for local agricultural producers.

It will provide the capacity that local conservation districts simply don't have in meeting the unique challenges of the Sound. This project would mirror others that have occurred or are occurring in nationally important watersheds.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The Puget Sound region is home to diverse natural resource dependent industries, including everything from fishing, tourism and recreation to agriculture and forest products. As an estuary, the Sound also houses diverse fish and wildlife species. The Sound itself consists of over 2500 miles of shoreline and is fed by over 10,000 streams and rivers that run throughout northwest Washington.

As the second largest container shipping port in the U.S., the Sound is extremely important to the State and Nation as a whole.

The watershed that feeds the Sound includes several large population centers, but is also home to significant agriculture production, including many specialty crops including raspberries, flower bulbs and vegetable seeds. Agriculture contributes \$5.6 billion to Washington State's economy, establishing its rank in agriculture production as 12th in the Nation.

Unfortunately, the Puget Sound region is undergoing tremendous change as more people move into the region and water quality and soil concerns increase. The bill before us today helps address these environmental concerns by encouraging agricultural producers in the region to adopt voluntary conservation practices.

The bill also requires a comprehensive plan to encourage cooperation among the multiple agencies and landowners in the region. Many farms in the Puget Sound are adjacent to endangered salmon-bearing streams and bear the brunt of protection for these and other endangered species.

These regulatory requirements place significant burden on producers struggling to stay on the land. We must continue to encourage cooperation and proactive partnerships with producers in this region, as well as the other heavily agricultural regions in the country, helping to keep producers on the land and keep the Nation's agricultural economy healthy and diverse.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield as much time as he may consume to the gentleman from Washington, (Mr. LARSEN), an original co-sponsor of the bill.

□ 1715

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN for speaking on behalf of this critical legislation. I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member of the Committee on Agriculture as well for helping bring H.R. 3184 to the floor.

The livelihoods of many families in Washington State depend upon the health and vitality of the Puget Sound. Unfortunately, as we already heard, there is no denying the health of the Puget Sound has been declining. Salmon and other species call the sound home and are either threatened or endangered. Water quality is extremely poor in certain places, and some aquatic species have shown harmful levels of toxins.

Agriculture is a large and important part of the economy in the Puget Sound region, and I represent much of it; and we do not want to see our ag economy decline either. Ag producers face the constant challenge of keeping good ag land in production while being

responsible stewards of the land and of the Puget Sound watershed. That is why the State of Washington and our State's Governor Chris Gregoire have led the charge in pulling together ag producers, business, industry, and local nonprofits and many others to develop long-term strategies to restore the Puget Sound.

However, our State cannot do it alone. This legislation takes a first step, and only a first step, to provide critical Federal support to those efforts by developing a competitive, comprehensive, conservation program to help determine the right conservation planning efforts for local agriculture producers. As well, again, this is only a small piece of the puzzle. Most of that puzzle will come from State and local governments.

These types of efforts have been done or are being done in other areas of the country. The results of comprehensive conservation planning helps ag producers make smart conservation decisions and investments, and, in turn, takes important steps restoring the health of the Puget Sound. This bill will provide the capacity that local conservation districts simply do not have in meeting the unique challenges of this critical watershed.

Ag producers in Washington State have a role to play in protecting the health of the Puget Sound, and they are more than willing to do their part, but we need a comprehensive conservation strategy to get that job done, and that is what H.R. 3184 helps us do. I urge the passage of H.R. 3184 and again thank the chairman and the ranking member of the committee for helping to bring this to the floor.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3184, a bill to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out a competitive grant program for the Puget Sound area to provide comprehensive conservation planning to address water quality.

For generations, Puget Sound has been the most important geographic feature driving human settlement in the region—first Native American communities followed by the 4 million people who now call it home. With 2,500 miles of shoreline and 2,800 square miles of inland marine waters, it is the second largest estuary in the United States after Chesapeake Bay. Puget Sound is environmentally, culturally and economically linked to Washington State's way of life and it is truly one of America's most spectacular bodies of water, with more than 200 species of fish, 25 kinds of marine mammals, 100 species of sea birds as well as clams, oysters and shrimp.

But the health of Puget Sound is in decline—its waters are experiencing the stress of growth and development and its ability to sustain the abundant fishery we've always enjoyed is in doubt. Around the Sound we have detected low levels of oxygen and increasing concentrations of toxic substances in aquatic animals. With the overall health of this great ecosystem in decline, we have launched a cooperative effort involving all of the local government entities around the Sound, as well as the State and Federal governments, to curtail any harmful substances from being introduced

into its waters, to change unwise industrial and agricultural practices and to continue aggressively our research into the causes of pollution in this historically pristine inland sea.

One of our responses must be to encourage innovation and action at the local level and to help local communities recognize the importance of incremental actions in the overall solution. Congressman RICK LARSEN and I have introduced H.R. 3184, the "Puget Sound Watershed Comprehensive Conservation Project Act of 2007." This legislation is supported by all Members of the Washington State congressional delegation. It would authorize a total of \$25 million in grants to assist non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, Tribes, and individuals in implementing land management practices and projects that improve water quality and habitat for fish and wildlife in the Puget Sound watershed.

H.R. 3184 authorizes conservation projects that will target innovative conservation measures where they do the most good. The program is intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production.

Mr. Speaker, the Federal government is playing a very important role in restoring the health of Puget Sound, and I believe H.R. 3184 can make a vital contribution to this effort. I urge adoption of the resolution.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from South Dakota (Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3184.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. HERSETH SANDLIN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill just adopted.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from South Dakota?

There was no objection.

EXTENSION OF AUTHORIZATION OF SMALL BUSINESS PROGRAMS

Mr. GRIJALVA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3206) to provide for an additional temporary extension of programs under the Small Business Act and the Small Business Investment Act of 1958 through December 15, 2007, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3206

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,